

Nonproliferation and Beyond

Truly, it is amazing, it is wonderful, that 92 non-nuclear nations indicate willingness to spurn nuclear arms of their own. A real sacrifice for some, a convenience for others, a gesture for still others, the treaty is for all a major contribution to world peace. In deciding to depend for their protection and peaceful nuclear capacity on the great powers, they have exercised courage as well as responsibility. Indeed, the surprise is not that there were heavy misgivings among many of the 92, and among all those who failed to endorse the nonproliferation treaty. The surprise is that in most cases the misgivings were overcome.

Every nation ought to accept the treaty. None which refuses will be regarded as a responsible world citizen. Even so, the treaty imposes restraint on non-signers, specifically, the sure knowledge of being declared outlaws if they acquire their own bombs. And in some cases the fact that a rival has signed will remove a powerful incentive to make one's own bomb.

In the years of the treaty's gestation, few expected it would ever be born. Without the faith and work of those few, it would not have been. In Washington, the Arms Control Agency and particularly its chief, William Foster, have earned the country's deep gratitude. We would hail, too, the appropriate Russians if we knew who they were.

At the General Assembly, President Johnson renewed his pledge to seek limits on the great powers' strategic weapons. This reflected his proper understanding that, in return for securing the have-nots' agreement on nonproliferation, the haves assume a clearcut obligation to curb their own arms. The President observed that avoidance of a further strategic-arms race depended on reaching "an agreement" with the Russians.

Is this so? The Soviet position, well understood as such within the Administration, is that Moscow will not approach such an agreement while the United States is at war with a Soviet ally. Until recently, this seemed to pose an insuperable hurdle, and the United States had reluctantly announced a decision to deploy the anti-China Sentinel missile defense, despite its fears that Sentinel might lead both Moscow and Washington to put up ABM systems against each other.

Now, however, the situation may have changed. New intelligence estimates of Chinese and Russian progress reportedly grant the United States more time to decide on Sentinel deployment. The President's retirement frees him from the inhibition of a campaign "missile gap" charge. Budget pressures are tighter. A number of Senators, led by Mr. Cooper, believe it to be safe, wise and necessary to slow down on Sentinel and they will attempt to deny all but research funds for it. It becomes possible to see, in the handling of Sentinel deployment, whether the United States is meeting the nonproliferation treaty's test of good faith.